



Department of Health

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

MARY T. BASSETT, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Commissioner

KRISTIN M. PROUD
Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner

December 29, 2021

Dear School Administrator:

In the coming days, school districts will be receiving an allotment of rapid tests that New York State has purchased for distribution to your schools. These tests are being provided to help your district achieve our mutual goal of keeping children in schools. While we recognize that the timing of the distribution of rapid tests is not ideal, and in many cases it may present some logistical challenges, we ask that you work with your local BOCES offices to obtain these tests and distribute them in the manner that will help your district keep kids in school.

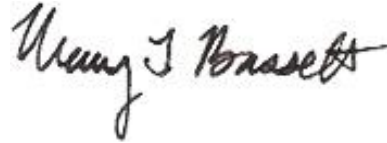
There are a number of strategies to keep our children safe in schools. First and the best defense: get vaccinated, and encourage your students and their families to get vaccinated, as well. Increased vaccination rates, along with the effective use of well-fitting masks, are the way we can return closer to normal as soon as possible. Without higher vaccination rates, we all will need to continue implementing the various mitigation strategies in schools.

Below are some ways we recommend you use the tests that we are providing to your district:

- **Implement [Test-To-Stay](#):** You can use rapid tests to begin implementing Test-To-Stay strategies in school. To fully implement Test-To-Stay, districts and schools will need additional tests, but the first delivery of rapid test kits can be used to begin the implementation of Test-To-Stay. Under DOH's current guidance, if a county adopts [Test-To-Stay](#), any asymptomatic unvaccinated school-based close contacts (e.g. students, teachers, school staff) can avoid school exclusion (but not other restrictions of quarantine) by testing negative through serial testing using rapid NAAT or antigen tests during a seven-day period following exposure. The exposed person must be tested a minimum of three times during a 7 day period following exposure. The person must have a negative test and be asymptomatic to return, but can do so without quarantine under this guidance. With the exception of attending school, the student/person is quarantined for all other activities, including extracurricular. More information on [Test-To-Stay](#) here.
- **Test on the First Day Back:** Tests may be used by schools to test students and staff returning from holiday break. This is an approach that may help prevent COVID-positive asymptomatic individuals from returning to school.

- **Use as Part of On-going Surveillance Testing:** If allowed by your district, tests could be used as part of a surveillance or testing strategy to identify positive cases among the school population. The tests can be used to monitor students and staff in classes where there are exposures. Based on test results, if individuals are asymptomatic and negative, they would be able to remain in school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary T. Bassett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner of Health